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STATE FOR EUR/CARC, DAS BRYZA  
USTRANSCOM FOR POLAD  
USEUCOM FOR JHOLBROOK

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TAGS: PGOV PREL AF AJ IZ TX KZ

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT GIVES GREEN LIGHT FOR  
TRANSIT OF COALITION SUPPLIES OVERLAND TO AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

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¶1. (C) Commander USTRANSCOM General Duncan McNabb and Ambassador Derse met Azerbaijani President Aliyev in Baku on November 17 to discuss proposed overland transport of supplies through Azerbaijan to U.S. and Coalition forces in Afghanistan. The President responded enthusiastically to the concept as it supports his vision of Azerbaijan becoming a regional distribution node. The President also welcomed the opportunity for transshipment of commercial goods using existing commercial transportation networks and local procurement of sustainment supplies. End Summary.

Good Partnership

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¶2. (C) General McNabb opened the meeting by stating this was his second visit to Baku, the first being in 1992 when he dropped off a load of medical supplies, and commented how the city had changed since then. He further thanked the president for Azerbaijan's support in Iraq and Afghanistan, commenting on the USG's deep appreciation for and the value of the overflight clearance the U.S. enjoys. President Aliyev replied that we have a "good partnership, as it should be between partners . . . a broad and successful relationship.' He went on to say that our energy partnership has opened the door and laid the foundation for his vision of a regional transportation route.

Azerbaijan: The New Hub

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¶3. (C) President Aliyev discussed his vision for Azerbaijan ascending as a regional leader, especially in the realm of transportation. "We created opportunities in the field of energy, and now we see others joining us." The same is true with transportation . . . if the U.S. will join with us, others will come. We will connect with the eastern Caspian (countries) and they will come when there is something here to come to." President Aliyev went on to discuss his new infrastructure investment. "We're buying tankers, ferries, ports, airports, highways, railways . . . we're 80 percent complete and the missing parts will come in the next two years. Now Azerbaijan has more to offer."

¶4. (C) Expanding on recent Baku Energy Summit success, he conveyed his expectation for future Kazakhstani use of the southern energy corridor. "I am almost sure of Kazakh support. Without our route, they cannot increase production." He said this is a good example of the type of cooperation he was speaking of, because Kazakhstan joined the operation because of the Azerbaijani ports. He highlighted the important agreement Azerbaijan had signed with Kazakhstan the previous week at the Summit on a joint Caspian transportation system. "The eastern Caspian nations become more courageous as they see success build upon success."

Northern Distribution Network

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¶5. (C) The General explained that his primary purpose in coming to Baku was to discuss Azerbaijan's potential as a link in a Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to Afghanistan.

The United States is seeking to maximize the number of available routes there for sustainment items, i.e. food and construction materials, while delivering most lethal items by air. At this, the President surprised the group by saying that "If you want to take military items too, we don't mind."

¶6. (C) General McNabb mentioned the possibility of procuring some necessary items locally, and to that end mentioned that the Defense Logistics Agency expected to send a representative in December to survey the market. Keying off this opportunity the President enumerated high quality local commodities which Azerbaijan can produce in excess of its own requirements (many kinds of produce, sugar, butter, tea,

cheese, dry milk, etc.). He assured General McNabb of his support for the DLA survey.

Comment

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¶7. (C) General McNabb's meeting with the President was successful in that it was clear that USTRANSCOM's Northern Distribution Network initiative will be well received in Azerbaijan and has Presidential support. Echoing the Presdeint, the Foreign and Defense Ministers also welcomed overland trasnport through Azerbaijan in their meetigns wiht McNabb (septels). Ambassador Derse noted in subsequent meetings with the President and Foreign Minister that based on the GOAJ's positive reception of TRANSCOM proposal, USTRANSCOM would begin immediately the shipment of commercial cargo across Azerbaijan to Afghanistan. The President and Foreign Minister welcomed this decision and underscored their interest in a DLA visit re local procurement.

¶8. (C) Given these discussions, we are comfortable with TRANSCOM proceeding immediately with shipments and a DLA visit. Embassy recommends that General McNabb consider writing a letter to President Aliyev to thank him for a productive visit, Azerbaijan's cooperation, to state that transhipments will begin and DLA will soon send a representative to look into local procurement.

¶9. (U) General McNabb cleared this cable.  
DERSE